



Just say no to spaghetti marketing

Have you ever tried “SPAGHETTI MARKETING?”

You know ... that’s where you throw a bunch of spaghetti against the wall and hope that something sticks. We’re not big fans of spaghetti marketing. Dental marketing can be challenging enough without resorting to ideas that are doomed to fail from the start.

A roundup of the usual suspects

We don’t have any particular bias toward or against any particular tactic. It is just that after working with thousands of dental practices over the years, we have yet to hear one story of a dentist receiving new patients from coffee mugs featuring his or her practice logo (for example).

Maybe you’ve had a run-in with one of the usual suspects — bus benches, car wash bulletin boards, event programs or souvenirs, grocery cart ads, imprinted trinkets, phonebook covers, event placards, calendars or plastic pens, restaurant placemats, small Yellow Pages ad (last in the section), and/or ads disguised as editorial (unless they are written by *real* pros). Most of these things can’t hurt you, but those same dollars could be invested in other options which deliver “trackable” return on investment.

Bonus list: Plus there are some things that can make you feel good. Pay for Chamber of Commerce ads, church/synagogue ads, Little League sponsorships, etc., from your charitable donations budget (not marketing), since they are civic, not business-producing strategies.

The (rare) exception is when you are heavily and visibly involved with the given organization. Remember, charity is good. Confusing it with marketing is bad.

How to spot the pitch, stand your ground, and protect your wallet

Sooner or later, an enterprising salesperson will find you on their radar. And what’s truly amazing is that the new and unusual gizmo and the carefully crafted sales pitch will sound compelling, enticing, and urgent. But if it looks and sounds like a fast pitch, shift to slow gear and proceed with caution:

Pitch: “*The cost is low.*” — Of course it’s cheap. If it could deliver a quantifiable audience and/or measurable response, it would not be such a bargain.

Pitch: “*Just one new case/patient will pay for this.*” — A variation of “low

cost,” but worse, there’s usually no accurate means to track ROI.

Pitch: “*It’s mighty cute, creative, original.*” — Yes, and a lot of people buy into the gimmick idea because “they love it” or think “everyone would love this.” Don’t confuse witty with effective. Imprinted merchandise is not a good medium for most circumstances.

Pitch: “*You’ll be first...*” — Being first in line may be a good signal to let someone else prove the concept. You can revisit when it actually has a track record.

Pitch: “*This is the only remaining (item, position, space).*” — See above. First, last, or discounted rate is a selling technique and no assurance that it will produce results.

Pitch: “*Your staff is all for it.*” — Swell. Is the staff going to pay for it?

Pitch: “*We print thousands of these and distribute them free all over town.*” — Two caution flags here: The quantity printed is not the same as quantity of readers or responders. Plus, being free may not be a plus either.

Pitch: “*If you don’t do this, I’ll take it to your competitor.*” — Talk about slimy! When you hear this one, grab your Yellow Pages, hand it to the rep, and tell him or her, “Be my guest.” If you are lucky, your most aggressive competitor will fall for this and waste precious marketing dollars on this losing proposition.

What to do instead

The bottom line is that these things almost never work, so don’t waste your time or budget. Instead, create and stick with your well-considered, carefully planned marketing program. No more spaghetti marketing or born losers — create a one-year marketing plan for your practice. **DE**

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